

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

CAROL BROWN,

Plaintiff,

-against-

CRYSTAL CAMPBELL,

Defendant.

21-CV-10276 (LTS)

ORDER OF DISMISSAL

LAURA TAYLOR SWAIN, Chief United States District Judge:

Plaintiff, who is appearing *pro se*, brings this action alleging that Defendant, who is her sister, violated her rights. By order dated January 18, 2022, the Court granted Plaintiff's request to proceed without prepayment of fees, that is, *in forma pauperis* (IFP). The Court dismisses the complaint for the reasons set forth below.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

The Court must dismiss an IFP complaint, or any portion of the complaint, that is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); *see Livingston v. Adirondack Beverage Co.*, 141 F.3d 434, 437 (2d Cir. 1998). The Court must also dismiss a complaint when the Court lacks subject matter jurisdiction. *See Fed. R. Civ. P.* 12(h)(3).

While the law mandates dismissal on any of these grounds, the Court is obliged to construe *pro se* pleadings liberally, *Harris v. Mills*, 572 F.3d 66, 72 (2d Cir. 2009), and interpret them to raise the “strongest [claims] that they suggest,” *Triestman v. Fed. Bureau of Prisons*, 470 F.3d 471, 474 (2d Cir. 2006) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted) (emphasis in original). But the “special solicitude” in *pro se* cases, *id.* at 475 (citation omitted), has its limits –

to state a claim, *pro se* pleadings still must comply with Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, which requires a complaint to make a short and plain statement showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.

The Supreme Court has held that, under Rule 8, a complaint must include enough facts to state a claim for relief “that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). A claim is facially plausible if the plaintiff pleads enough factual detail to allow the Court to draw the inference that the defendant is liable for the alleged misconduct. In reviewing the complaint, the Court must accept all well-pleaded factual allegations as true. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009). But it does not have to accept as true “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action,” which are essentially just legal conclusions. *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555. After separating legal conclusions from well-pleaded factual allegations, the Court must determine whether those facts make it plausible – not merely possible – that the pleader is entitled to relief. *Id.*

BACKGROUND

Plaintiff brings this action against her sister, Crystal Campbell. Plaintiff’s complaint is not the model of clarity, but the Court is able to discern that Plaintiff alleges that, after their father died, Defendant kept all of his belongings and valuables. Plaintiff brings this action seeking to recover family pictures, their father’s ashes, and other household items from Defendant.

DISCUSSION

The subject matter jurisdiction of the federal district courts is limited. Federal jurisdiction exists only when a “federal question” is presented, 28 U.S.C. § 1331, or when there is “diversity of citizenship” between the plaintiff and the defendant and the amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000.00, 28 U.S.C. § 1332. Federal courts “have an independent obligation to determine

whether subject-matter jurisdiction exists, even in the absence of a challenge from any party.” *Arbaugh v. Y&H Corp.*, 546 U.S. 500, 514 (2006) (citing *Ruhrgas AG v. Marathon Oil Co.*, 526 U.S. 574, 583 (1999)). If a court “concludes that it lacks subject-matter jurisdiction, [it] must dismiss the complaint in its entirety.” *Arbaugh*, 546 U.S. at 514; *see also* Fed. R. Civ. P 12(h)(3).

A. Federal question jurisdiction

To provide a basis for federal question jurisdiction, a plaintiff’s claims must arise “under the Constitution, laws, or treaties of the United States.” 28 U.S.C. § 1331. A case arises under federal law if the complaint “establishes either that federal law creates the cause of action or that the plaintiff’s right to relief necessarily depends on resolution of a substantial question of federal law.” *Bay Shore Union Free Sch. Dist. v. Kain*, 485 F.3d 730, 734-35 (2d Cir. 2007) (quoting *Empire Healthchoice Assur., Inc. v. McVeigh*, 547 U.S. 677, 690 (2006)). Mere invocation of federal jurisdiction, without any facts demonstrating a federal law claim, does not create federal subject matter jurisdiction. *See Nowak v. Ironworkers Local 6 Pension Fund*, 81 F.3d 1182, 1188-89 (2d Cir. 1996).

Plaintiff’s complaint does not set forth any federal claims or otherwise assert a basis for federal question jurisdiction. Because Plaintiff’s claims do not arise under the Constitution or any federal statute, federal question jurisdiction does not apply.

B. Diversity jurisdiction

Plaintiff also does not allege facts demonstrating that the Court has diversity jurisdiction to consider this action. To establish jurisdiction under Section 1332, a plaintiff must first allege that the plaintiff and the defendant are citizens of different states. *Wis. Dep’t of Corr. v. Schacht*, 524 U.S. 381, 388 (1998). In addition, the plaintiff must allege to a “reasonable probability” that the claim is in excess of the sum or value of \$75,000.00, the statutory jurisdictional amount. *See*

28 U.S.C. § 1332(a); *Colavito v. N.Y. Organ Donor Network, Inc.*, 438 F.3d 214, 221 (2d Cir. 2006) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).

Plaintiff alleges that she resides in Bronx County, New York. Plaintiff fails to provide an address for Defendant, but she asserts in her complaint that Defendant “lived in upstate New York.” (ECF No. 2 at 9.) Because Plaintiff’s allegations indicate that she and Defendant are citizens of the same state, diversity of citizenship does not exist between the parties, precluding diversity jurisdiction.¹

As Plaintiff has failed to allege facts showing that the Court has either federal question or diversity jurisdiction of this matter, the Court dismisses Plaintiff’s complaint for lack of subject matter jurisdiction. *See Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3); Makarova v. United States*, 201 F.3d 110, 113 (2d Cir. 2000) (“A plaintiff asserting subject matter jurisdiction has the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that it exists.”).

C. Leave to amend is denied

District courts generally grant a *pro se* plaintiff an opportunity to amend a complaint to cure its defects, but leave to amend is not required where it would be futile. *See Hill v. Curcione*, 657 F.3d 116, 123–24 (2d Cir. 2011); *Salahuddin v. Cuomo*, 861 F.2d 40, 42 (2d Cir. 1988). The Court declines to grant Plaintiff leave to amend her complaint because the allegations show that the defects in Plaintiff’s complaint cannot be cured with an amendment.

CONCLUSION

The Court dismisses the complaint for lack of subject matter jurisdiction. *See Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3).*

¹ Even if Plaintiff and Defendant are citizens of different states, the complaint would be insufficient to demonstrate that the Court has diversity jurisdiction because Plaintiff fails to allege damages in excess of \$75,000.00.

The Court certifies under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3) that any appeal from this order would not be taken in good faith, and therefore IFP status is denied for the purpose of an appeal. *See Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 444-45 (1962).

The Clerk of Court is directed to mail a copy of this order to Plaintiff and note service on the docket.

SO ORDERED.

Dated: January 31, 2022
New York, New York

/s/ Laura Taylor Swain
LAURA TAYLOR SWAIN
Chief United States District Judge